

Missouri's Children

As of 1998, children under the age of 18 accounted for nearly 26% of Missouri's population, with 7% of Missourians under age 51. In Missouri, as in the rest of the United States, children are more likely to be poor than any other age group, and they are more likely to be chronically poor than adults or senior citizens. Young children are more likely to be poor than older children. According to 1998 census estimates, 20.6% of children under age 6 were poor, statistically unchanged from 1997. However, 1998 poverty rates for poor children overall increased to 18.9%, the first time the child poverty rate steadily worsened between 1979 (13.5%) and 1993 (21.2%), before falling to 15.6% in 1998.

Poverty is often associated with poor outcomes for children. Poor children are more likely than their more affluent cohorts to be ill, to suffer from abuse or neglect, and to drop out of high school. Two indicators are commonly accepted as proxy measures of child poverty. The percentage of children enrolled in the free/reduced lunch program is a measure that reflects participation in a program for which household poverty is a qualifying criterion. Births to mothers without high school diplomas is an accepted and established indicator of both poverty status and educational attainment for children. Children who are born to undereducated parents face the highest odds of living in chronic poverty. In 1995, the poverty rate was 57% for children living with parents who had dropped out of school, but only 4% for children living with at least one parent with a college degree. Overall, the rate of Missouri children enrolled in the USDA free/reduced lunch program increased throughout the 1990s from approximately 30% in 1990 to nearly 36% in 1999. However, the rate of children born to mothers without high school diplomas has decreased from nearly 22% in 1990 to slightly more than 19% in 1999.

In 1999, there were approximately 46,600 reports of child abuse and neglect involving nearly 73,000 children. From these reports 8,594 children were confirmed as abused or neglected. Physical neglect (54.6% of children) was found much more frequently in child abuse investigations than physical abuse (21.7%). Sexual abuse was found in 18.3% of confirmed cases. More than one-third of the child abuse victims were less than 6 years old. Additionally, Missouri's Child Fatality Review Panel examines all child deaths that have suspicious or unclear causes. In 1998, thirty-three fatalities were confirmed as related to child abuse or neglect, a decrease from 45 the previous year. Most (90.9%) of the children who died as a result of abuse or neglect were less than 6 years old, and more than half (54.6%) were infants.

Child abuse or neglect and related factors account for approximately 2/3 of the initial placement reasons for children. In 1999, 6,705 children entered the out-of-home placement system, approximately 75% for the first time. Overall, the rate of children entering out-of-home placement has increased between 1992 and 1999. In 1999, 17,000 Missouri children were in the custody of the Department of Family Services (DFS), with an average length of stay of nearly twenty-six months. Almost half of the children in DFS custody at the end of Fiscal Year 1999 had been in three or more foster homes or other custodial settings. The state has shown a steady increase in the number of finalized adoptions. In 1995, 521 adoptions were finalized while 956 adoptions were finalized in 1999 - an 83.5% increase.

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Missouri Women's Council

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Resources for Missouri's Children

In the 1990's, Missouri acted as a national leader in innovation in the child welfare arena. Missouri has sought to involve and empower communities in evaluating, prioritizing, directing, and delivering services that are both locally relevant and locally specific. These initiatives are not designed to supplant state-sponsored/mandated services but to work cooperatively with them to ensure a positive impact on children and families. This policy directive is based on the concept that through local knowledge and ingenuity, services can be delivered most effectively, not only to reach at-risk individuals and families but also to offer preventative assistance to a wide range of individuals, families, and the community itself.

Caring Communities Initiative

Missouri's Caring Communities Initiative focuses on the value of statewide, cross-agency program planning and joint implementation. All projects and efforts supported wholly or in part by Caring Communities dollars are intended to affect one or more of six results for Missouri's children and families: children and youth succeeding in school; children and families that are healthy; children safe in their families and families safe in their communities; youth prepared to enter the workforce and be productive citizens; young children ready to enter school; and parents working. For additional information about the Caring Communities Initiative, visit their website at <http://www.dss.state.mo.us/wreform/ccomm.htm>.

MC+ for Kids

MC+ for Kids, part of the federal Children's Health Insurance Program, is a health insurance program for uninsured children of low-income families who do not have access to affordable health insurance. Approximately 90,000 uninsured Missouri children are believed to be eligible for MC+ for Kids. Uninsured children, ages birth to 19, whose gross family income is up to 300% of the federal poverty level are eligible. For example, for a family of three making less than \$3,756 per month, the child (or children) would be eligible for coverage. For additional information about MC+ for Kids, visit their website at <http://www.dss.state.mo.us/mcplus/index.htm>

Parents Fair Share Program

The Parents' Fair Share Program is based on the idea that both parents are responsible for supporting their children. Parents' Fair Share can help you increase your ability to meet your child(ren)'s emotional and financial needs by helping you become self-sufficient. Parents Fair Share can also help you assume an active and positive role in your child(ren)'s lives. The Parents' Fair Share Program includes assessments and referrals for educational needs, employment needs and supportive services, which are provided through a network of community resources. For additional information about the Parents Fair Share Program, visit their website at <http://www.dss.state.mo.us/cse/pfs/index.htm>.

Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) Program

The WIC Program provides nutritious foods to supplement the diets of pregnant women, new mothers, infants, and children up to five years of age based on eligibility. Its formal name is the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children. The primary activities of the program are health screening and risk assessment, nutrition education and counseling, breast feeding promotion and support, referrals to services specific to individual needs such as health care providers and social services agencies, and issuing food instruments for supplemental nutritious food prescriptions. For additional information about WIC, visit their website at <http://www.health.state.mo.us/wic/#>.